DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 159 945 HE 010 159

AUTHOR Lester, Virginia L.
TITLE Life Stages and Learning Interests.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Association for Higher Education (Chicago, Illinois, March 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Ability; Biographical Inventories; *College Students; *Developmental Stages; Females; Graphs; Higher Education; Questionnaires; *Self Concept; *Self Evaluation; *Sex Differences; *Student Characteristics; Success Factors
IDENTIFIERS *State University of New York Empire State College

ABSTRACT

A series of profiles are presented, drawn from a Student Biographical Inventory questionnaire that asked students to rate themselves on a list of traits. The evaluations, obtained from 2710 entering students at Empire State College, have been grouped into two sets of analysis: traits reflecting the individual's success orientation and traits reflecting academic competence. The resulting profiles were constructed according to sex and seven developmental stages: Pulling Up Roots (21 and Under); Getting into Adult World (22-28); Putting Down Roots (29-36); Mid-Life Transition (37-43); Middle Adulthood (44-50); Late Adulthood (51-60); and Early Retirement (61 and Over). Drive to achieve, leadership ability, ability to handle stress, and independence are four traits analyzed under success orientation. On all four traits, males start out either slightly higher or at the same point as females, decline markedly during mid life and essentially decline during the subsequent three stages. Women, moving upward from a lowpoint, eventually surpass males on three of the four traits. Male and female perceptions of academic, writing, and reading abilities are very similar. Women rate themselves higher but both show a drop during mid-life. A reverse in the patterns occurs on the trait of intellectual self-confidnece. Men see themselves as more confident across almost all the developmental stages. (JMD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED159945

Virginia L. Lester
President
Mary Baldwin College
Staunton, Virginia

"LIFE STAGES AND LEARNING INTERESTS"

PRESENTED AT THE AAHE 1978 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Life Cycle Findings

As part of the Program Effectiveness and Related Costs research at Empire State College, each entering student is requested to complete a Student Biographical Inventory (SBI). This instrument contains questions about a student's background, sources of financial support, reasons for selecting Empire State and most important to this paper, a series of questions about how the student views him/herself, personal goals and self ratings on various intellectual and developmental competencies.

During the fall 1974 and the entire year 1975, all entering students received the SBI. Sixty-two percent of these people returned the questionnaire, yielding a total of 2710 respondents. These respondents are distributed across the age/developmental categories by sex as shown in Table 1. The 1974-75 sample has been compared on selected demographic characteristics (age, sex, marital status, learning center distribution, previous education and occupation) with the entire student body enrolled during the same period and found to be representative of all students in the College.

HE010159

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Virginia Lester

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

CN000 493
6/7/78

Table 1

Sample Distribution of Adult Learners at
Empire State College by Age, Sex, and Developmental Stage

Sex	Pulling Up Roots (21 and Under)		Getting Into Adult World (22-28)		Putting Down Roots (29-36)		Mid Life Transition (37-43)		Middle Adulthood (44-50)		Late Adulthood (51-60)		Early Retirement (61 and Over)		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Male	52	(39)	320	(50)	354	(56)	224	(48)	178	(38)	146	(44)	22	(49)	1296	(48)
Female	80	(61)	315	(50)	282	(44)	244	(52)	286	(62)	184	(56)	23	(51)	1414	(52)
TOTAL	132	(100)	635	(100)	636	(100)	468	(100)	464	(100)	330	(100)	45	(100)	2710	(100)

Source: Office of Research and Evaluation, Student Biographical Inventory, July 1, 1974 to December 30, 19

We have prepared a series of profiles drawn from the SBI question where students are asked to rate themselves on a list of traits as to how they compared with the average person of their own age. This question essentially tapped the individual's perceptions of themselves in relation to others.[3] All those students checking above average or highest ten percent were grouped together. The profiles were constructed, then, according to the age groupings and corresponding developmental periods shown in the following figures.

Student's evaluation of themselves on the traits have been grouped into two sets of analysis: traits reflecting the individual's success orientation and traits reflecting academic competence.

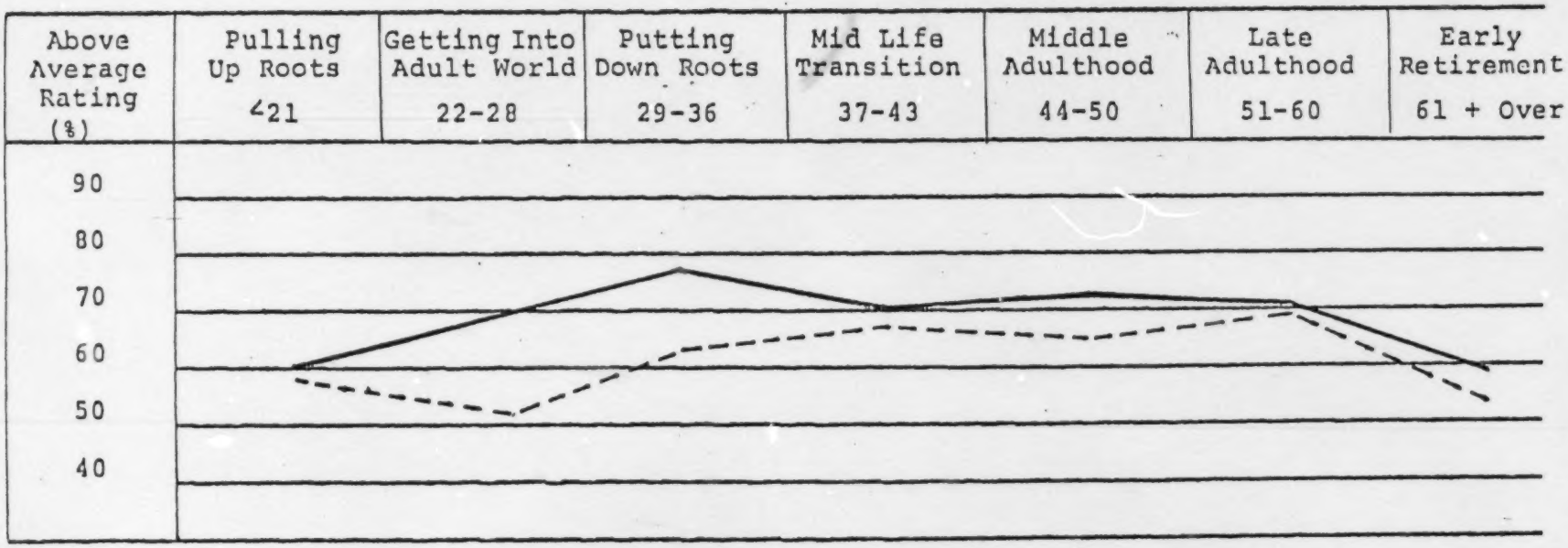
Perceptions of Success Orientation

Drive to achieve, leadership ability, ability to handle stress and independence are four traits analyzed under success orientation. On all four traits, males start out either slightly higher or at the same point as females during the pulling up roots stage, increase their self-concept ratings through the putting down roots stage, but decline

markedly during the mid-life transition period and essentially decline during the subsequent three stages. These patterns essentially confirm the finding of Levinson and Gould whose research shows that males during the Building of Dream stages should have strong self-concepts on the traits we have highlighted. Women at the pulling up roots stage are not interested in competing with men or in establishing a career but rather focus attention on getting married, building a nest and setting up a comfortable home environment. It is significant on all four traits that women move consistently upward from a low point, GIAW, through the mid-life transition period and eventually surpass males on three of the four traits. On two traits, drive to achieve and independence, women surpass men during or immediately after the mid-life transition period. Women thus are returning to college and the work world with strong commitments to achieve, establish independence and seek new personal goals at precisely the time when males have reached their career peaks and begin to shift their aspirations and interests to non-career activities.

Figure 2

Student Self Perceptions of their Leadership Ability*



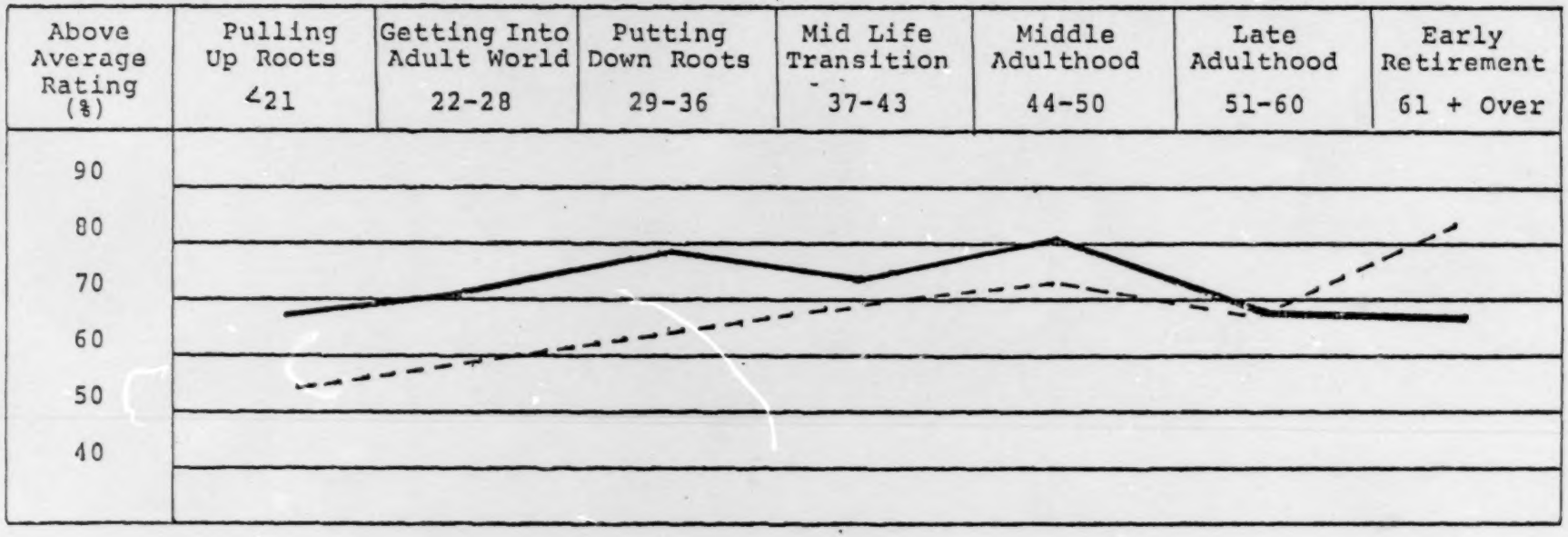
The solid line is for male responses; the dotted line for female.

Source: Office of Research and Evaluation, SBI Question #41 - Rate yourself on each of the following traits when compared with the average person of your age. We are interested in estimates of how you see yourself.

* Read the data in Figure 2 as follows: 60% of the males and about 58% of females rated themselves on the trait, leadership ability, as above average compared to the average person their own age during the Pulling Up Roots Stage. During the Putting Down Roots Stage, about 78% of the men and 64% of the women rated themselves as above average on this trait. The profile developed by linking the data responses across each stage shows graphically how males and females change over time.

Figure 3

Student Self Perceptions of their Ability to Handle Stress *



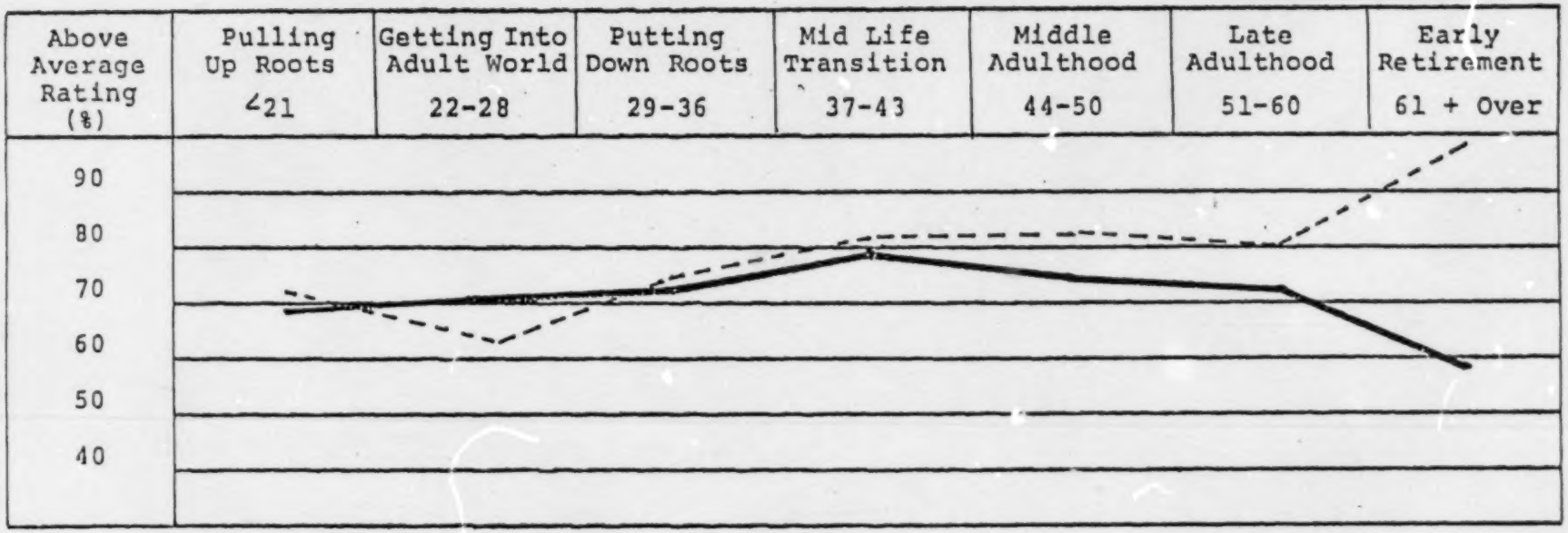
The solid line is for male responses; the dotted line for female.

Source: Office of Research and Evaluation, SBI Question #41 - Rate yourself on each of the following traits when compared with the average person of your age. We are interested in estimates of how you see yourself.

* Read the data in Figure 3 as follows: 68% of the males and about 55% of the females rated themselves on the trait, ability to handle stress, as above average compared to the average person of their own age during the Pulling Up Roots Stage. During Middle Adulthood, 80% of the males and 72% of the females rated themselves as above average on this trait. The profile developed by linking the data responses across each stage shows graphically how males and females change over time.

Figure 4

Student Self Perceptions of their Drive to Achieve

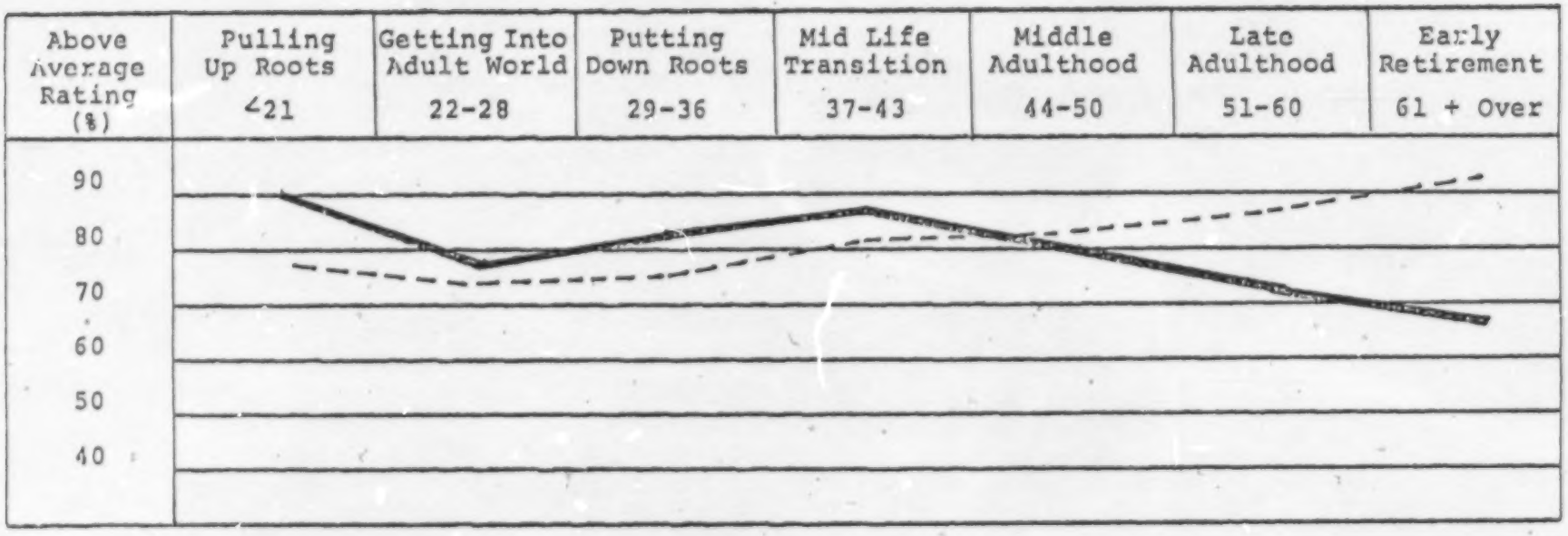


The solid line is for male responses; the dotted line for female.

Source: Office of Research and Evaluation, SBI Question #41 - Rate yourself on each of the following traits when compared with the average person of your age. We are interested in estimates of how you see yourself.

Figure 5

Student Self Perceptions of their Independence



The solid line is for male responses; the dotted line for female.

Source: Office of Research and Evaluation, SBI Question #41 - Rate yourself on each of the following traits when compared with the average person of your age. We are interested in estimates of how you see yourself.

Perceptions of Academic Competence

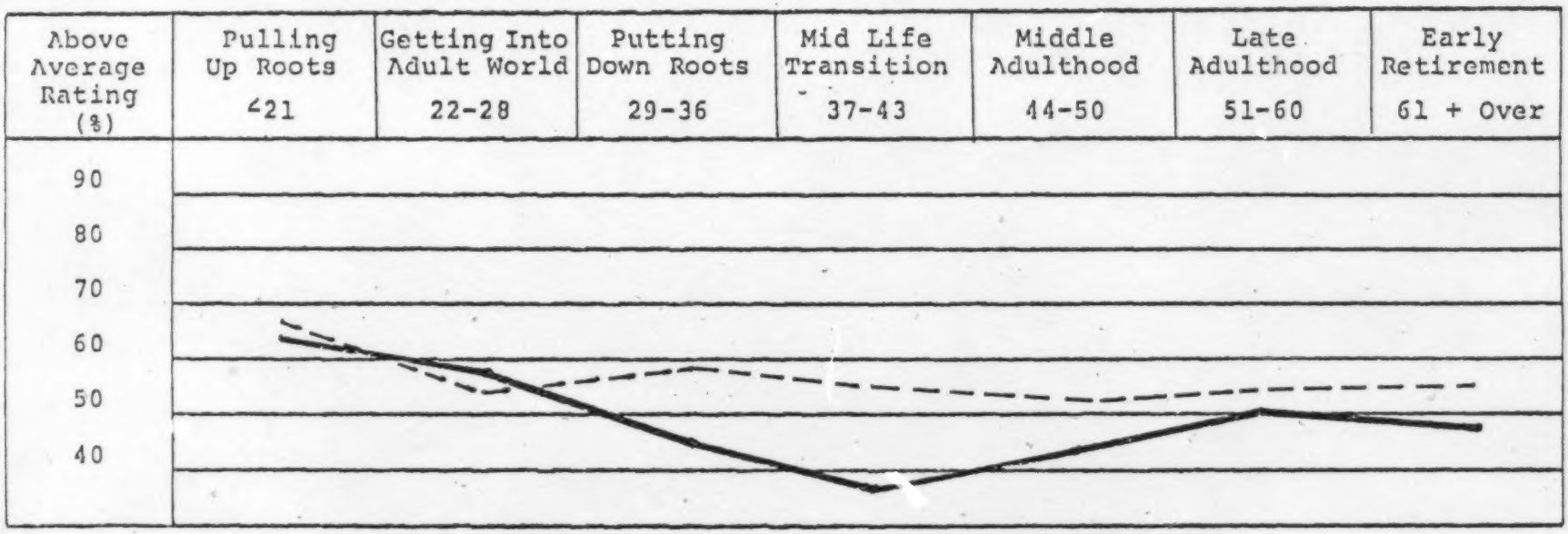
On the traits of academic ability, writing ability, and reading ability, there are remarkable similarities in how men and women perceive themselves. In almost all periods across the figures, women rate themselves higher than men and have somewhat more stable profiles whereas men start out relatively high in perceptions of their abilities (in the 55-65% range) but drop sharply (some 20-30% points) to the mid-life transition and then rise slowly to a new peak about late adulthood. Women see themselves declining on all four traits during the GIAW period but rise up slightly on academic and writing abilities during the putting down roots period. Women also show a drop during the mid-life transition period and a flowering during middle and late adulthood.

On the trait intellectual self-confidence, a reverse in the patterns occurs. Men see themselves as more intellectually self-confident across almost all developmental periods than women, although men experience a 25% decline by the mid-life transition period in intellectual self-confidence. According to the framework set forth in Figure 1, we would expect women not only to start out lower than men on intellectual self-confidence but hit their lowest point during the

putting down roots period. Women tend to gain somewhat during the mid-life transition period and continue to gain intellectual self-confidence during the succeeding three periods.

Figure 6

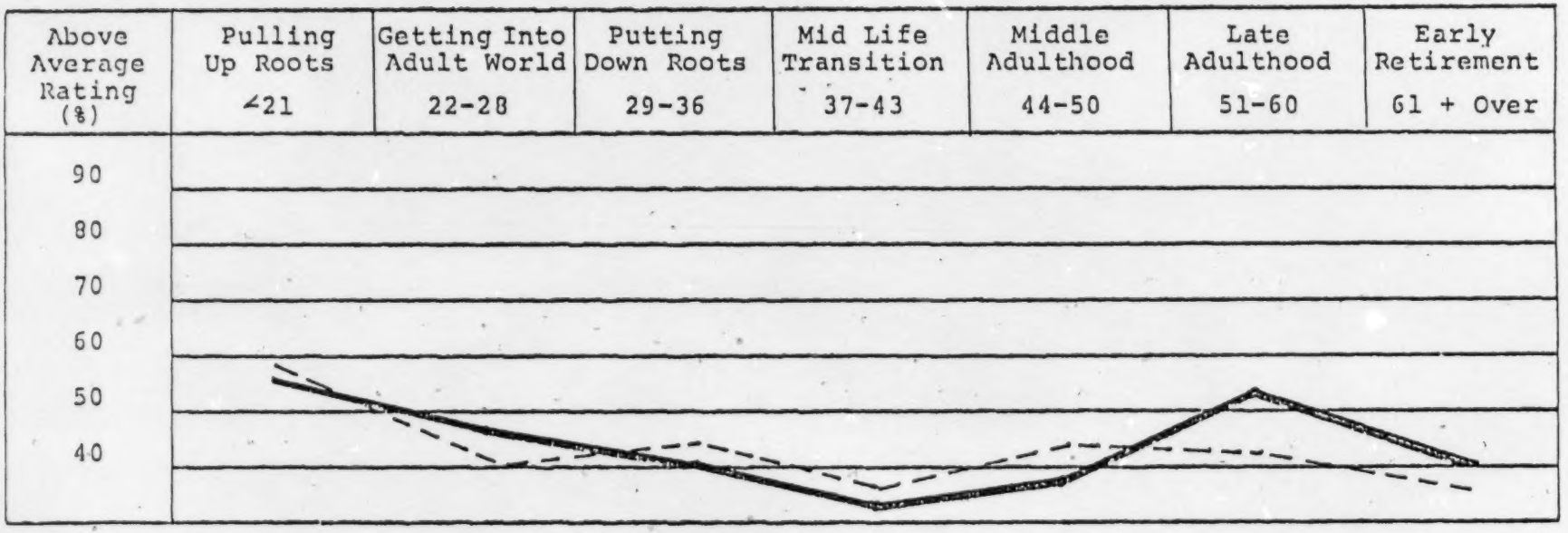
Student Self Perceptions of their Academic Ability



The solid line is for male responses; the dotted line for female.

Figure 7

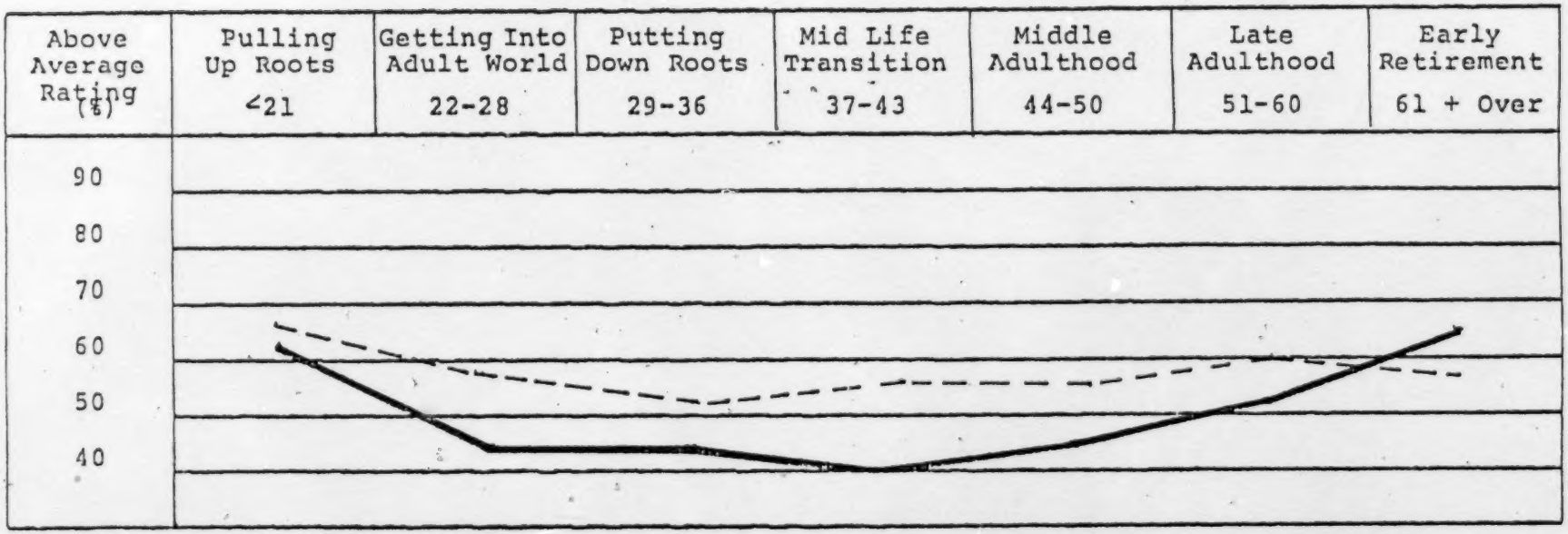
Student Self Perceptions of their Writing Ability



The solid line is for male responses; the dotted line for female.

Figure 8

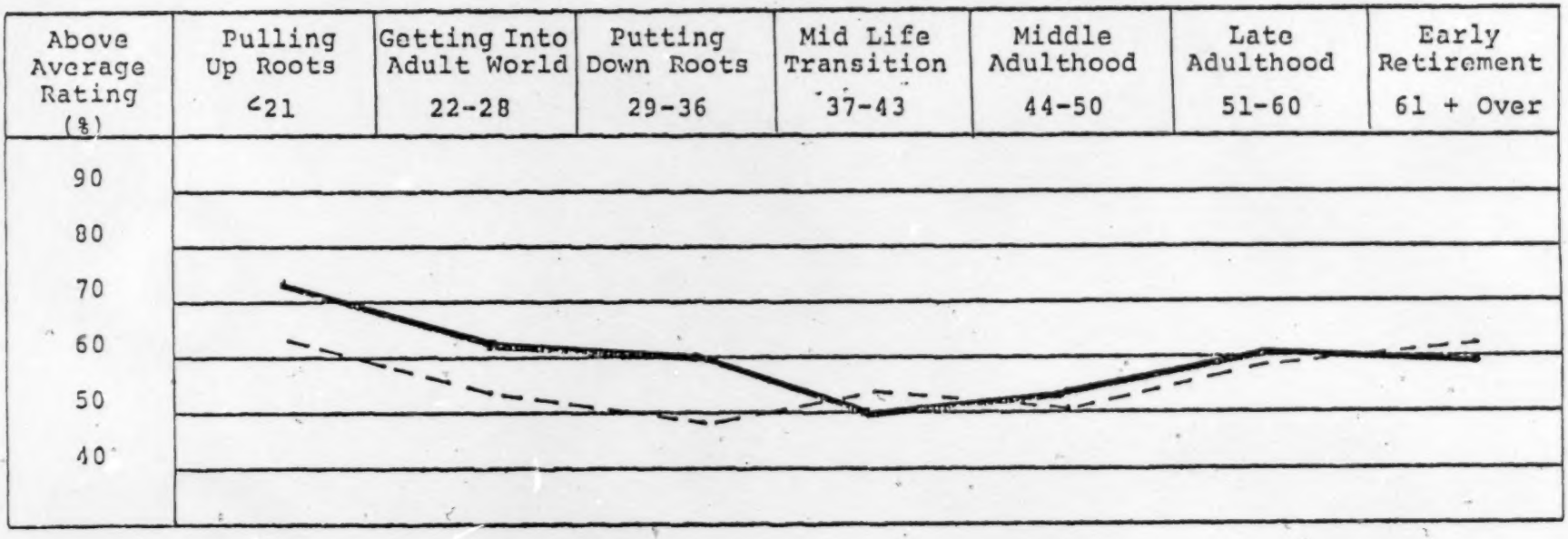
Student Self Perception of their Reading Ability



The solid line is for male responses; the dotted line for female.

Figure 9

Intellectual Self Confidence



The solid line is for male responses; the dotted line for female.